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比较文学：东方与西方

Department of Comparative Literature
Institute of Comparative Literature
Sichuan University , China



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Cross-civilization Studies: Keeping Pace with the Development of the International Academy and the Academic Frontiers

Cao Shunqing

Sichuan University

中文摘要：跨文明研究已经成为一个世界性的学术思潮。跨文明研究是一种强调对不同文明之间的异质性的研究。比较文学的跨文明研究的最终目的是追求在不同文明的异质性基础上产生的一种互补性。跨文明研究以追求一种“异中之和”或“和而不同”的文化理想而区别于全球化思潮。当前可以从3个学术前沿的问题来切入和推进中国比较文学的跨文明研究：一是“送去主义”或“发现东方和文化输出”的理论问题；二是比较诗学领域中体现出来的异质文明的不可通约性和可通约性研究问题；三是跨文明研究视野中的中国文化“失语症”问题。

The issues of cross-civilization studies, though advocated by me in 2002, is not a “blindly-acting” invention, but a basic grasp of the current development of the international academy and an objective generalization of the international academic trends of thoughts. With a comprehensive survey of current academic trends of thoughts, all the studies, no matter they are the political theories, cultural criticism, comparative literary theories, studies of comparative poetics, or the current factual studies of the Chinese comparative literature, are inevitably in transition to the

cross-civilization studies. In other words, the cross-civilization studies have actually been an international academic trend of thoughts. Without knowing this point, it is impossible to grasp truly the development of the basic international academic trend and the academic frontiers.

The most striking surge of this trend derived from the field of political studies. Samuel P. Huntington, a politics professor in Harvard University, advocated in 1993 “the clash of civilizations”, which draws the high concern all over the world and arouses the heated debates in the academia. “The clash of civilizations” has become an international core topic and extended into the various areas of the academy. Especially after the “9 • 11” Event, the selling of his book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, has been continuously soaring all over the world. It seems that the “9 • 11” Event has turned into the best endnote of his theories on “the clash of civilizations”. As a result, Huntington’s theories on “the clash of civilizations” and the “9 • 11” Event have promoted, both in theory and in practice, the world-wide focus on the heterogeneity, conflictiveness and co-existence of different civilizations. The scholars from different areas come to think almost spontaneously about the conflicts and coexistence between different civilizations, which, in return, has formulated an international academic trend of thoughts – cross-civilization studies.

Among the current international academic trends of thoughts, post-colonialism, ecology, feminism, deconstruction, and even neo-Confucianism focus spontaneously on the cross-civilization studies. In 2000, when Professor Tu Wei-ming^[1] from Harvard University lectured in Sichuan University, he gave great concern on the cross-civilization studies, because he said that from the international viewpoints, the impact of the ‘clash of civilizations’, advocated by his colleague, Professor Samuel P. Huntington, is enormous. And Tu himself has discussed it with him for quite a few times. Later Huntington’s viewpoints have changed a bit and come to realize the possible dialogue with the Buddhist civilization just because the ‘clash of civilizations’ is dangerous and it is necessary for different civilizations to have dialogues. Tu also thought the merits of Huntington’s viewpoints lie in his emphasis on cultural plurality. The “cultural plurality” and “dialogues between different civilizations”, discussed by Professor Tu Wei-ming, have actually been a core topic in the current international academia. The essence of this core topic is just the cross-civilization studies. In 2001, Hunan University Press published a book entitled *Tu Wei-ming: The Clash and Dialogue between Different Civilizations*. The

title of the book foregrounds the core topic—the cross-civilization—considered by the representatives of the neo-Confucianism. The first chapter of this book is a lecture, given by Professor Tu Wei-Ming in Yuelu Academy. He pointed seriously out in the lecture, “the dialogic conditions for the new civilization have arisen. Recently, a few great Western thinkers have reconsidered profoundly the Western Enlightenment. From the perspective of eco-environmentalism, anthropocentrism, representing the Western humanism, centers completely on human, which should be surpassed. From the perspective of multi-religion, the Western scholars are reconsidering profoundly how the Western civilizations from the age of enlightenment are open to the multi-civilization.” Professor Tu Wei-ming argues that “Confucian ethnics can provide the resources for the global dialogue of different civilizations.”(Tu 2001:14) That is to say, being confronted with the heterogeneity of different civilizations, what we should consider is not only their negatives, but also their positives, the dialogue and communication between them, which is the reason why we put forward such questions.

Another surge of this trend of global cross-civilization study derives from the trend of the post-colonialism, represented by Edward W. Said. The basic position and perspective of the post-colonialism is the issues of the relationship between the Orient and Occident civilizations, just as what Said himself has ever proposed, “Orientalism of course refers to several overlapping domains: firstly, the changing historical and cultural relationship between Europe and Asia, a relationship with a 4000 year old history; secondly, the scientific discipline in the West according to which beginning in the early 19th century one specialized in the study of various Oriental cultures and traditions; and, thirdly, the ideological suppositions, images, and fantasies about a currently important and politically urgent region of the world called the Orient.”(Said 1985:90) What Said concerns basically is actually the issues of the relationship between the Orient and Occident civilizations, or the issues of the cross-civilization study. Edward W. Said holds that “orientalism” is a complex concept, which is constructed out of the fetters and limits of the Western civilization, the influence of the Western cultural hegemony, and the ignorance and prejudices of the Oriental civilization. The Occident constructed a kind of so-called oriental image with their blinkers of the Western civilization. On the one hand, this kind of oriental image stands for “laziness” and “stupidity”, but on the other hand, the Orient itself has some fascinating “mysterious” hue, just as Edward W. Said ever said that “the two aspects of the Orient that set it off from the West ... will

remain essential motifs of European imaginative geography. A line is drawn between two continents. Europe is powerful and articulate; Asia is defeated and distant.”(Said 1979: 57) The point is that the construction of the Oriental image is elicited by the numerous Western scholars with the objective and positive methods. Edward W. Said points out that “Orientalism is a field of learned study,”(Said 1979: 49) and “by and large, until the mid-eighteenth century Orientalists were Biblical scholars, students of the Semitic languages, Islamic specialists, or, because the Jesuits had opened up the new study of China, Sinologists.” (Said 1979: 51) Why does the learned and positive study become otherwise a kind of man-made illusion or prejudice? One key point is that there is an enormous difference between the Oriental and Occidental civilizations. From the superficial level, the knowledge of the “Orient” is elicited by the scholars’ rigid arguments and reasoning, which seemingly incarnates the connotations of the “Orient”. However, what we can not ignore is the deeper level of this issue – when the Western scholars are reasoning, they can not avoid a position of the civilization hegemony and superiority. Then Edward W. Said argues that “in a quite constant way, Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand.”(Said 1979: 7) What’s more, “the imaginative examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged.”(Said 1979: 8) In other words, the emergence of the knowledge of “Orientalism” is based on a position of the West-centrism. How can the so-called “Orient” accord with the image *per se* of the Oriental civilization in the process of the Occidental civilization “reshaping” the connotations and image of the Oriental civilization? Of course, there are many other theoretical arguments against each other among the theoretical schools of the post-colonialism. But, the theory of “Orientalism”, according to the cross-civilization proposed by Chinese scholars, is more enlightening. To us, the enlightenment lies in the fact that if we want to do cross-civilization studies, we should, first of all, break the position of West-centrism full of hegemonic consciousness, walk out of the shadow of the one-dimensional “Orientalism”, and reconsider the particularities further from the dialogues between the Orient and the Occident, on which the cross-civilization studies are based.

The cross-civilization is not only a trend of thought, because, so to speak, it

has already budded in the concrete practice of the comparative literary research, but outlines clearly a trace of the cross-civilization studies in the practice of comparative literature. In the different periods of development in comparative literature, the French school put great emphasis on the study of the history of literary relationships, so the global breadth of vision and the traits of openness in the disciplinary of the comparative literature has been neglected. The American school, represented by René Wellek, criticizes the methodology of the French school and initiates actively the parallel study of the comparative literature, which, without entity relationships, extends the scopes of the comparative literary studies. Wellek (1970) also argues that the studies, paying more attention to the aesthetic evaluation, imply that the remote ideal, establishing the global literary history and the literary academia should be internationally expected. René Etiemble, the leading scholar of the French school of the comparative literature, holds the similar opinions. René Etiemble (1974) transcends the French school's one-fold emphasis on "fact relation" and holds that historical seeking and critical or aesthetic meditation can be two correlative methods in studying the comparative literature. The so-called "critical or aesthetic meditation" is one method of the parallel study, through which the human literature can be regarded as a whole, so the literary phenomena in different civilizations can be equally treated as the subject of the comparative literary study. René Etiemble emphasizes especially the comparison between the Oriental and Occidental literatures. He even thinks that he talks unreasonably about the comparative literature if he doesn't read *A Dream of Red Chamber* and *Outlaws of the Marsh*, and doesn't know the Indian and Arabian literatures.

However, the proposals of Chinese School of Comparative Literature (CSCL), proposed by the Chinese scholars, incarnate the most self-conscious sound. On the one hand, the emergence of the CSCL was closely related to the cross-civilization fortune in the studies of Chinese Comparative Literature. Chinese Comparative Literature, whose basic impetus lies in the confrontation and collisions between Chinese and Western Cultures, has the quality of spontaneity. From the year of 1904, when Wang Guo-wei published his renowned *The Comment on A Dream of Red Mansions*, to the year of 1908, when Lu Xun published his eminent *On the Power of Romantic Poetry*, where he proposed that only if the comparison is complete and suitable can self-consciousness come into being, we can easily find a basic characteristic: Chinese Comparative Literature in its early stage was caused

not by the influence of Western Comparative Literature but mainly by the confrontation and collision of Chinese and Western cultures. It is well-known that , in France, the first paper on the comparative literature was published in 1895 and the first comparative literary lecture was established in 1896 (Dexter, Lyons)^[2], the first book, Paul Van Tieghem's *La Littérature Comparée*, which discussed comprehensively French School's opinions, was published in 1931. In fact, while the Western comparative literature was budding in the west, Wang Guo-wei's *The Comment on A Dream of Red Mansions* and Lu Xun's *On the Power of Romantic Poetry* had been published. What's more, Lu Xun, in his *On the Power of Romantic Poetry*, had advocated and practiced a principle—only if the comparison is complete and suitable can self-consciousness come into being. At that time, René Wellek, one of the founders of American Comparative Literature, was only 5 years old, and René Etiemble, the leading scholar of French Comparative Literature was just born. Therefore, I come to think that Chinese Comparative literature came into being spontaneously and had its own intrinsic impetus, which illustrates that Chinese Comparative Literature was born in the confrontation and collision between Chinese and Western cultures, with the birthmark of the confrontation and collision between Chinese and Western cultures. Its development accompanied the campaign which saved the nation from extinction, the controversy between Chinese and Western cultures, and the social, political, and cultural reform. The comparative consciousness of Chinese scholars is not the French cultural chauvinism, or the American non-national cosmopolitanism, but the cultural worriment confronted with Chinese and Western cultural collision, which attempts to find a new way to develop Chinese culture. The worriment and attempt have finally evolved a big controversy, which enhances greatly the cross-civilization comparative consciousness between Chinese and Western civilizations: a large group of scholars attempt to find, in Chinese and Western cultural collision, the mutual comparison, interpretation, complement, communication and understanding, and even reconstruct the literary concepts. The study of Chinese Comparative Literature, first of all, should walk out of the single-disciplinary characteristic of the homology and similarity, and attempt to carry out the comparative study of Chinese and Western literatures. On the other hand, the characteristic of Chinese School is its disciplinary orientation of the cross-civilization, whose background is the heterogeneity of Chinese and Western civilizations. The heterogeneity is meant not only by the differences and conflicts between different civilizations, but also by the dialogues

and communication between them. Therefore, we can say, what Chinese School represents is the newest development and achievements in the trend of the comparative literary cross-civilization studies.

After we have investigated the development of cross-civilization study in the comparative literary theories, it is necessary for us to further research into the concrete practice of cross-civilization comparative literature, especially the study of comparative poetics. Admittedly, the study of comparative poetics should go hand in hand with the pursuit of the general poetics, so it will be the only way from the comparative literature to the general literature. Furthermore, we can find the cross-civilization comparative poetic studies often achieve more if we retrospect the practices of the comparative poetics. The heterogeneity and otherness form a complementary space^[3], so we can avoid the bias of a single civilization and provide more basic and profound foundations for the construction of the general poetics.

Earl Miner puts forth in his *Comparative Poetics: An Intercultural Essay on Theories of Literature* that “we need also to construe both literature and poetics pluralistically”(Miner 1990:238), “the more diverse the literature drawn on for evidence, the better founded will be any poetics we derive”(Miner 1990: 238), and, therefore, he finally points out that “for all the many hazards, however, only intercultural evidence is adequate for an account of comparative poetics.”(Miner 1990: 238) It is quite true that we, in the study of comparative poetics, should attach importance to the problem of otherness especially between the alien civilizations. Similarly, Stephen Owen, as a sinologist, has always focused on the study of Chinese literature. Moreover, he pays great emphasis on the otherness between Chinese and Western poetics, which has been caused by the heterogeneity between Chinese and Western civilizations, when he studies the Chinese and Western poetics. Consequently, he (Owen 1992) reviews , in *Readings in Chinese Literary Thoughts* in the form of the anthology, the core terms in the ancient Chinese poetics. With the comparison with the Western poetics, he reveals the respective characteristics of the Western and Chinese poetics.^[9] Some American-Chinese scholars, among whom James J. Y. Liu is one of the representatives, have tried the practice of the cross-civilization comparative poetics. James J. Y. Liu extends the connotations of the comparative poetics in his *Chinese Theories of Literature*, and holds that “comparative studies of historically unrelated critical traditions, ..., will be more fruitful if conducted on the theoretical rather practical level.”(Liu 1975: 2)

The implication is that it will be more fruitful if a comparative study has been applied to the poetic traditions of different civilizations. Therefore, James Y. J. Liu argues that "a comparative study of theories of literature may lead to a better understanding of all literature." (Liu 1975: 2) Consequently, such a cross-civilization comparative poetic study makes it possible to emerge a general poetics or a common poetics. The comparative poetic practice of William Yip has the similar characteristics. With regard to the alienness of the Chinese and Western civilizations, William Yip puts forward a theory of "cultural mode". He maintains that every culture has a stable "mode", but if we want to seek for "universals", we should give up the bigotry of sticking to one "mode". In other words, only if we break through the shackle of one stable "cultural mode", can we really recognize the differences between two alien civilizations. (Yip 1987: 11) So to speak, this theory functions as a foundation for the cross-civilization comparative poetic study. Furthermore, he, just as James Y. J. Liu has revised Abrams' theory of literary four-elements and used it in the study of the Chinese and Western comparative poetics, tries to span, in the general poetics, the alien elements between different civilizations and literary traditions, and hence arrives at the common literary laws for the Chinese and Western cultures." (Yip 1987: 20) In a word, through a survey of the historical practice of the cross-civilization comparative poetics by the Western and American-Chinese scholars, we can see, if we can break through the alien civilizations' barrier, it is possible to add new academic perspectives to the study of the comparative poetics and provide an easy path for the general poetics or common poetics.

After retrospection of the trend and the manifestation of cross-civilization studies world wide, we still have to contextualize it into the current Chinese cultural and literary context and reconsider it. That is to say, I phrase this problem by observing the current development of Chinese culture and Chinese literature, it is a problem-oriented observation. The initial cultural interaction of East and China started about 100 years ago and has flourished during the last century, moreover, it is converging with the trend of globalization and cross-civilization studies. Therefore, with regard to the current situation we attempt to set up the framework of cross-civilization studies from three perspectives: 1) the theory of "Giver", "Rediscovery of Orient" and "Culture export"; 2) the research on commensurability and incommensurability among heterogeneous civilization which is the major concern of the study field of comparative poetics; 3) the "aphasia" problem which is

the current symptom of Chinese culture.

1. “Giving”, “rediscovery of Orient” and “cultural output”

Ji (1993) found it unequal between cultural interaction of East and China, so he put forward that except for “taking” we have to have the courage of “giving” and even be bold and resolute to do so in action. It is true that “taking” was and is the main stream of cultural interaction from the beginning of the last century on. It seems quite natural since occidental culture surged into China armed with its stable material power, the situation, however, is abnormal in that each nation has to contribute to the world civilization. Thus, Wang (2006) has phrased two concepts of “Rediscovery of Orient” and “Cultural export” which furthered the concept of “Giving” in the context of globalization. Admittedly, “Giving” is a very insightful thought. what we have to face up is that most part of our own tradition has been lost, to be clear, is concealed by occidental culture. The dilemmatic situation provides us little for “Giving”, and not to mention our cultural ideal of “complementary with diversity”. In short, our starting point has to be “Rediscovery of orient” where cultural export and cultural interaction depart. Still, among all the other things, the departure off the shadowland of western centralism and cultural hegemonism is of top importance because the cultural merits of a nation can only be traced in an equal communication among different cultures.

2. Incommensurability vs. commensurability

Cross-civilization studies may shed light on the orientation of local comparative poetics studies. Incommensurability is a term — along with its opposite, commensurability—used to discuss the extent to which it is possible to measure and judge different traditions by the same standards. Discussion of this concept has arisen from the tension between two basic arguments. The first of these is the indisputable fact that some cultural models differ from others in such fundamental ways as to make it impossible for the advocates to understand each other and some forms of traditions may be so far from the other traditions that their merits are impossible to be seen in another view. Still, traditions differ on what counts as evidence and grounds for decidability, thus making it impossible to make a judgment between them. There is no common or objective decision criterion justifying the preference for one set of claims over another, much less one tradition in its entirety over another; the second is that, in spite of the above-mentioned